

**LEAGUE OF NATIONS
QUESTIONS**

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**IN RELATION TO PUBLIC HEALTH
AND TO ECONOMIC CONDITIONS**

**GENEVA 1935
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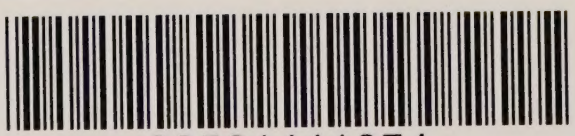
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At the last Assembly of the League of Nations, the First Delegate of Australia, Mr. S. M. Bruce, submitted a proposal which he described as "marrying Agriculture and Health". This phrase made a hit and lent precision to ideas hitherto ill defined and imperfectly apprehended.

Agriculture is in a bad way ; the claims of health remain unsatisfied. Marry them, and you save the one and strengthen the other.

The idea might be further extended to include the notion of the marriage of health and economics.

Students of world events are confronted by a strange paradox : there are gluts in the agricultural markets ; while a substantial part of mankind is underfed.

Farmers and health experts have complained alike. The farmer said : " There is over-production, prices are collapsing, work is no longer remunerative ; let us turn all the devices of protectionism to account." The health expert : " Hundreds of thousands of human beings are under-developed, their health and efficiency are impaired, because they are short more especially of *protective foodstuffs* : milk, fresh vegetables, fruit, and meat." The man in the street was aghast that a state of semi-starvation should prevail in some parts of the world, while in others food was being destroyed.

The vicious circle After 1929, world prices of agricultural products — especially cereals — dropped heavily. Compared with actual consumption and with the production for previous years, production was excessive. In Europe, Governments decided on measures of protection — tariffs and quotas — in the interests of the peasant population, the backbone of society.

These measures hit agricultural countries, which exported agricultural produce to industrial Europe. Being restricted in the sale of their own products, they had to curtail the purchase of the manufactured goods of industrial countries.

In those countries which had formerly been buyers of foodstuffs, protection brought about an increase in home agricultural production without reducing production in the rest of the world. Protection thus aggravated that apparent over-production, which was looked on as the source of the evil.

The industrial countries frequently carried increased production so far as to become actual exporters of agricultural goods. The agricultural countries felt forced to intensify their industrial efforts and to produce manufactures, previously imported, at high costs.

On either side, there was a decline in purchasing power; trade was paralysed. Agricultural distress brought industrial distress and unemployment in its train, this in turn aggravated the distress of agriculture, and so the process went on.

Here, then, is the vicious circle from which the nations have not yet succeeded in escaping.

*Demand
on the side
of Health* For the past ten years, the League of Nations Health Committee has had under consideration the question of the best possible feeding of the greatest number.

Research was first directed to the study of conditions in a country with a large population suffering from under-nutrition — Japan ; next, attention was given to the production and distribution of one of the food-stuffs most essential to mankind — milk. In 1932, a study was made of the influence of the world economic depression on public health, with particular reference to nutrition. Lastly, the Health Committee appointed two experts to prepare a general report on “ Nutrition and Public Health ”.¹

This report, while touching on numerous and varied questions, is simple in plan. It is an attempt to answer three questions :

1. What are the food requirements at the various stages of human development ; what, in particular, are the working man's requirements ; and how can they be ascertained?

2. What resources are available to meet those requirements?

3. How can those resources be actually applied to the satisfaction of these needs? How can nutrition be organised in the best interests of public health?

¹ *Quarterly Bulletin of the Health Organisation*, Vol. IV, No. 2, June 1935 ; 151 pages.

The first question is that of dietary standards. Its importance was generally realised during the great war, when Governments had not only to feed the armed forces but also provide for the food supply of the civilian population. Dietary standards — that is to say, the quantity and quality of food required — call for revision in the light of modern physiological knowledge. Physical standards — the various methods for determining the state of nutrition, or the state of health from the standpoint of the food supply to the body — must be adjusted to practical use.

Dietary standards are the demand which health makes on economics ; one might even say they are its ultimatum.

The second question is that of supply, which embraces production, preservation and distribution of foodstuffs. The report studies in particular four staple foods of enormous and world-wide economic and physiological importance : bread, meat, milk and fat.

Once the foodstuffs are on the market, the next step is purchase : how does income — that is to say, in the main, how do wages — affect nutrition ? The question is more complex than appears at first sight and, under the conditions of the world economic depression is naturally to the forefront in every country.

The third question is that of organised nutrition. Doubts as to the propriety of State intervention in nutrition need not detain us, for the State long since intervened : it has set up public machinery to deal with adulteration ; it feeds various groups of persons : prisoners, schoolchildren, students, the army ; it takes measures

to cure and prevent deficiency diseases, no less dangerous than infectious epidemic diseases : scurvy, pellagra, rickets, beri-beri ; it has begun to supplement the dietary of schoolchildren by means of school meals and the distribution of milk in the schools. In certain countries, such as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Government organises communal meals for workers and peasants in canteens, which help to raise the standard of nutrition among the people.

Both directly and indirectly the State is dealing with education in the matter of nutrition, in the various school grades, from the elementary school to the medical faculties, and among the population at large by means of specialist visiting nurses and vast propaganda organisations (in the United States the "nutritionists" and Co-operative Extension Service in Agriculture and Home Economics). Increased purchasing power and the distribution of foodstuffs cannot suffice to make good the shortage and deficiency attendant upon poverty ; *education* is essential.

The authors of the report, when studying the means of satisfying dietary requirements, found themselves carried beyond the limits of their own particular subject of physiology and hygiene into the field of economics. When seeking remedies for malnutrition, they found that the existence of surplus stocks and apparent over-production did not mean that the world was producing too much, or even enough, food to satisfy the requirements of mankind. Production, preservation and distribution have hitherto been regarded mainly as economic phenomena, without sufficient attention being paid to

their bearing upon public health ; the economic depression has directed attention to the gap which exists very generally between food requirements as specified by the physiologist and the means of satisfying them which are available under present economic conditions. It is now realised that, in general terms, the problem is to harmonise developments in the economic sphere and in the sphere of public health ; and it is in this way that every country comes to have a policy in the matter of nutrition.

Between the two terms of this paradoxical contradiction — over-production and under-nutrition — there is room for a third : thanks to scientific and technical progress, the possibilities of production are infinite. The Malthusian spectre of an over-populated foodless earth need trouble us no more. In the background, behind that over-production which is thought to be real, lurks a potential production on an even vaster scale. Hygienists who complain of malnutrition would willingly make use of this possible source of plenty. But those already persuaded of an over-production fatal to agriculture refuse to countenance such a possibility. Their aim is to cut down production. Which of the two parties is right?

The time has come to revise current notions of production and consumption.

If we were to assume that consumption as we know it or think we know it, consumption which might be thought normal because usual, is the “ natural ” level

of consumption — notwithstanding the widespread evidence of malnutrition of which we hear — we might perhaps fairly talk of over-production. But a multiplicity of enquiries have convinced us of the reality of malnutrition : fifteen millions underfed in Britain, twenty-five to thirty millions in the United States ! An enquiry in the United Kingdom has shown that in a group of poor families 47% of the children are under sized and under weight, as compared with 5 % in well-to-do families, and infant mortality in the second group is only half as high as in the poorer group—largely on account of nutrition. If this is the case in these relatively advanced countries, what is the position elsewhere ?

Further, the studies of Stiebeling and Ward show that, in order to provide for the whole population of the United States an abundant dietary (according to the standards of well-to-do families), an additional forty million acres would have to be brought under cultivation ; until this was brought about, agriculture would accordingly still be under-producing. Now, it is an established fact that present world production does not suffice to ensure an adequate food supply for the whole of mankind. When health problems are examined with due regard to economic factors and economic problems are considered in their bearings upon health, the myth of over-production vanishes, leaving the sad reality of under-consumption.

Cereals, to which attention is often almost exclusively devoted, are not the sole product of agriculture. What is lacking in nutrition in general is *protective foodstuffs* — milk, dairy products, eggs, fresh vegetables, fruit and

meat — notwithstanding the apparent over-production. Agriculture has supplies available, but, as a result of protective restrictions, they are not made obtainable. The trouble is not even limited to the rejection by Europe of overseas products ; individual countries fail to consume quantities of their own home-produced protective foods, or restrict their production.

The free play of trade exchanges determines the world level of prices, protection determines prices on the home market. There is often a huge discrepancy between the normal free market prices and the prices artificially created by a system of protection. Imported wheat, costing 100 units in the United Kingdom, stood (in 1934) at 268 in Italy, 276 in Germany, 300 in France. Butter, costing 100 units in the United Kingdom, cost (in 1934) 233 in Hasselt, 271 in Berlin, 283 in Paris. In Germany, at the same date the price of beef, etc., was four times, that of pork three times, that of eggs three times, that of sugar five times the world market rate. Dear food entails specially great hardships for the poorer classes.

That is why Agriculture should now
Marriage of say to Health : “ I note what you say
Health and about under-nutrition ”. The public
Agriculture health demands greater consumption,
not restrictions on production. Governments are spending money on keeping up prices by a policy of restriction. Let us impress upon them that this money would be far better spent in increasing consumption. Restriction will neither save world agriculture nor improve national public health. Increased consump-

tion will improve public health, will provide a market for agricultural produce, will create wealth. Here, then, is a first attack on, a first attempt to escape from the vicious circle. We can agree to teach people what they should eat to be healthy. Governments can consider how to provide for adequate supplies of protective foods to the unemployed and lower-paid workers. The possibilities of marketing in special areas at reduced rates can be studied, the advantages of supplementing the dietary of children by school-meals and school-milk distribution can be taken into account.

A state of things has been observed in certain countries that no doubt exists in all : the diet of a more or less large section of the population is below what physiologists regard as the ideal standard. Money spent on raising this to the desirable level would improve both public health and the position of agriculture.

Who can doubt that such a policy, if judiciously applied, would be of benefit to the country that applied it? Can it be applied to the world as a whole? The difficulties which undoubtedly exist will grow less as international institutions develop.

Such is the immense problem with
The problem which the League is now dealing.
of nutrition This account follows the chronological
and the League order of the League's work in the year
of Nations 1935, which will always be a memorable year in the history of these enquiries. It should be remembered, however, that ten years have now elapsed since the study of nutrition was

begun by the Health Organisation on the proposal of several Governments. Countries such as Japan and Chile, in which under-nutrition is very prevalent, notwithstanding their degree of civilisation, formed the subject of the first surveys which already contained some reference to economic considerations, in addition to the observations of doctors and health experts. The world economic depression added to the importance of the problem by supplying, unhappily, only too many opportunities of studying it. It is on the basis of a general report by the Health Organisation that this question, now ripe for discussion, has come up before all the League organisations.

The nutrition of the worker is both
The problem of a question of health and a question
nutrition and of economics. At the International
the International Labour Conference in June 1935, Sir
Labour Frederick Stewart, Government dele-
Conference in gate of Australia, referred to the work
1935 of the Health Organisation on nutrition
and the economic depression. As
a former Minister for Commerce, he expressed the view
that an improved demand for nutritive foodstuffs would
play no small part in restoring world equilibrium ; there
was always malnutrition among the unemployed. He
agreed with the health experts that the malnutrition
of the general population was a problem, not only of
poverty, but also of ignorance.

Miss Grace Abbot, First Delegate for the United
States, described the results of enquiries carried out in
the United States : there were signs of increasing

malnutrition ; in certain districts, nine-tenths of the children were 10% or more under weight ; a meeting of health officers of the United States and Canada had recorded its view that the nutritional needs of children were the most important problem of the moment. Teaching in regard to the value of “ protective food-stuffs ” — milk, green vegetables, fresh fruit — had not yet penetrated everywhere. The urgent tasks were to determine the economic bases of nutrition and to educate the masses in the matter of nutrition. The Conference adopted the following resolution submitted by Sir Frederick Stewart :

Seeing that nutrition adequate both in quantity and in quality is essential to the health and well-being of the workers and their families ;

And seeing that, in various countries, evidence has been brought forward to show that large numbers of persons both in town and country are not sufficiently or suitably nourished ;

Seeing, moreover, that an increase in the consumption of agricultural foodstuffs would help to raise standards of life and relieve the existing depression in agriculture :

The Conference welcomes the attention drawn by the Director in his report to the problem of nutrition and requests the Governing Body to instruct the Office to continue its investigation of the problem, particularly in its social aspects, in collaboration with the Health and Economic Organisations of the League of Nations, the International Institute of Agriculture and other bodies capable of contributing to its solution, with a view to presenting a report on the subject to the 1936 session of the Conference.

The report of the International Labour Office will deal chiefly with the following points, which come within the province of the Office :

1. Consumption of foodstuffs in homes, particularly those of the workers, in its relation to the maintenance of health and output of work. Methods, organisation and institutions already existing and capable of facilitating the necessary consumption.

2. Nutritional standards as they are established to-day, according to profession, sex, age and type of work.

3. Correlation between the food requirements of workers and the capacity of world production ; between the requirements and the capacity to buy.

The paradox of malnutrition at a time of alleged over-production ; increased consumption as a remedy for the agricultural depression and inadequate nutrition ; a change of policy as regards agricultural bonuses and subsidies, which, instead of being spent on restrictions, would purchase health and increase the consumption of agricultural produce—in a word, the marriage of Health and Agriculture : such, as already stated, were the fundamental ideas in the speech of the Australian delegate, Mr. Bruce, to the Assembly. He propounded the question plainly, not in terms of any one given country, but in terms of the world as a whole. Not only are there agricultural countries in which malnutrition exists side by side with ample production, but there are wealthy countries at an advanced stage of civilisation in which too little of the protective foodstuffs are consumed. What is wanted is to revive trade between these richer countries and the

agricultural countries. Later, means must be found of providing protective foodstuffs even for those populations which cannot at present afford them.

The margin between production and consumption is not so great that results cannot be obtained fairly rapidly, if appropriate measures are taken.

The cost of transport and distribution, important factors in the cost of foodstuffs, is sometimes very high, and in certain countries the gap between wholesale and retail prices is too wide. Prices might be lowered without decreasing the return to the farmer. The first point is to realise that high prices prevent the population from purchasing the foodstuffs most essential to health.

After Mr. Bruce's statement, the delegations of twelve countries (Argentina, Australia, Austria, United Kingdom, Canada, Chile, Denmark, France, Italy, New Zealand, Poland and Sweden) signed the following motion :

The undersigned delegations,

Recognising that both in their own countries and elsewhere the relationship of nutrition to the health of the people has become a social and economic problem of widely accepted significance and further recognising that this subject has an important bearing on world agricultural problems,

Request that the Agenda Committee will consider placing the subject on the Agenda of the present session of the Assembly.

They further suggest that the subject might be conveniently considered by the Second Committee.

In the discussion in the Second Committee, several delegates drew attention to the gap between wholesale and retail prices and urged the importance of reducing obstacles to trade and distribution. The delegate of

New Zealand recalled the suggestion of Sir John Orr at the last meeting of the British Association with regard to the creation of public utility offices, subsidised by the State, to organise the purchase and sale of products under conditions which would guarantee the proper nutrition of the poorer classes. The delegate of France emphasised the conditions of ignorance which, together with poverty, are the cause of malnutrition, not only in the lower classes, but even in the well-to-do classes ; he insisted on the importance of education and on the rôle that the elementary schools and practical domestic science training should play. The conditions of human existence were changing, and new forms of civilisation were appearing to which man must adapt himself, beginning during childhood in the elementary schools.

All the delegates stressed the need for a greater knowledge of the facts if nutrition schemes are to be established on a scale adequate to cover the whole problem. The demand for an enquiry put forward by the delegate of Australia met with unanimous approval.

The discussion showed in the main that :

(1) Increased production gave to Governments the opportunity of taking another step forward in their attempt to build a healthier people ;

(2) They could do so by extending their present activities in the comparatively new field of nutrition ;

(3) This was a direct and practical way of dealing with the problem of agricultural surpluses and the depression of prices that has resulted therefrom.

On consideration of the report of Lord De La Warr, the Assembly, on September 25th, 1935, adopted the following resolution :

The Assembly,

Having considered the subject of nutrition in relation to public health and of the effects of improved nutrition on the consumption of agricultural products, urges Governments to examine the practical means of securing better nutrition and requests the Council :

(1) To invite the Health Organisation of the League of Nations to continue and extend its work on nutrition in relation to public health ;

(2) To instruct the technical organisations of the League of Nations, in consultation with the International Labour Office and the International Institute of Agriculture, to collect, summarise and publish information on the measures taken in all countries for securing improved nutrition ; and,

(3) To appoint a Committee, including agricultural, economic and health experts, instructed to submit a general report on the whole question in its health and economic aspects to the next Assembly, after taking into consideration, *inter alia*, the progress of the work carried out in accordance with paragraphs (1) and (2) above.

At its session in October 1935, the
The problem of nutrition and the Health Organisation of the League of Nations Health Committee, which is composed of doctors and heads of public health administrations, deliberately concentrated its attention upon the hygienic aspects of the problems on the basis of the above-mentioned report.

Rational nutrition as a factor in the complete development of man was placed in the forefront. Dame Janet Campbell laid stress on the special needs of women during pregnancy and lactation and of

infants, and stated that the International Council of Women would take an active interest and support the proposed studies.

It is evident that nutrition in infancy, childhood and adolescence must be planned. It is therefore necessary first to determine the needs of childhood and adolescence. In the case of adults, these needs will have to be considered in connection with age, sex and the nature of employment.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the importance of methods of gauging the state of nutrition by a report on nutrition in the Netherlands, where an attempt has been made by direct and indirect methods to assess the relations between nutrition and health.

On the other hand, the difficulty of nutrition surveys is well known. It is therefore desirable that the technique of studies and enquiries should be defined practically in the light of recent research.

Foodstuffs are studied and analysed with two main objects in view. The first is to consider their composition and nutrient value in each country. The second is to discover any frauds on the market. It is no longer possible to be satisfied with the chemical analyses of the past. Salts, vitamin-content, freshness and the technique for preserving foods must all be considered. This involves a complete scientific survey of the value of foodstuffs. Should not techniques be unified? In spite of the diversity of foodstuffs according to countries and climates, methods can certainly be unified up to a certain point.

There cannot be any useful planning without *education*. This should take into account the psychological as well as the physiological factors of nutrition. Medical training should include the study of the theory and practice of nutrition to an extent commensurate with their importance. Public education falls within the realm of social service—namely, the work of health visitors in the home. In the Netherlands, there have recently been quite successful attempts to give practical education to housewives.

The Assembly's discussions on the economic aspects of nutrition were based on the assumption that increased consumption would bring about improved public health. Recent experiments in Japan, Norway, the United Kingdom and in many other countries would prove that this assumption is correct.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics representative stated that twenty million people in the Union were being fed under schemes of collective nutrition, in accordance with the teachings of science. It would be of interest to study the technique of these vast social undertakings from the standpoint both of economics and of health. The preparation and distribution by "secondary centres" of food that has been half prepared in central kitchens has proved popular in countries where large numbers of unemployed and destitute have been fed in times of crisis.

In order to determine what is the "normal state" and for the purpose of calculating data for particular forms of nutrition in the case of normal or abnormal subjects, it would be useful to classify individuals

according to *nutrition types*, as such a classification would make the work of school and labour medical officers much easier.

The Health Committee adopted the following resolution:

The Health Committee,

Being of opinion that these studies may be a useful contribution to public health progress and would be the logical development of its former activities in this field :

Requests the Bureau to constitute an expert committee of twelve members at most, with the following terms of office :

(1) To consider the suggestions contained in the Health Organisation's report or formulated when this report was examined by the Health Committee and during the Assembly discussions on the matter (document A.61.1935) ;

(2) To select such questions of practical importance as might usefully be studied internationally and to classify them by order of priority ;

(3) To submit a first report to the Co-ordination Committee set up in accordance with the third paragraph of the Assembly resolution of September 25th, 1935. This report would be the basis for the work to be carried out in co-operation by the technical organisations and international institutions mentioned in the above resolution.

	The work of the Assembly and of
<i>The problem</i>	the Health Committee on nutrition has
<i>of nutrition</i>	had what is called a good Press. The
<i>and public</i>	idea of a connection between economics
<i>opinion</i>	and health already makes headway.

It establishes a link between certain hitherto uncoordinated and sometimes conflicting needs and desires. It embraces the notion of health, the tilling of the soil and industry. It affords a high aim for economic reform and means for the promotion of public health.

It has aroused much interest in the British Press. The *Statist* analyses in detail the speeches of Mr. Bruce and Lord de la Warr. The *Spectator* calls for a national nutrition policy in the form of a Five-year Plan. The *Economist* comments on Lord de la Warr's memorable utterance to the effect that the Problem of Poverty in Plenty could not be solved by mere removal of the Plenty.

The Geneva discussions were reported in the British daily papers, including *The Times*, with leading articles bearing significant titles : "Better Food for All", "Farming and Health", "Poverty and Plenty", "Underfed People and Restricted Food Production".

The question of retail-price levels was also taken up and there has already been talk of inevitable changes. The new Viceroy of India, when visiting the Grocers' Exhibition at the Royal Agricultural Hall, had a conversation with dealers on their rôle in nutrition and enquired whether, if the Government invited them to play their part in a national nutrition policy, they would remain on the defensive and cling to their rights or whether they would be prepared to put forward a constructive plan.

These reports have already familiarised public opinion — so far, it must be admitted, chiefly in British circles — not only with the main idea, but also with the initial means of putting it into effect. Physiologists and health experts must first specify the food needs of mankind and submit these demands to the economic machine. Such a question came up during the war : means had to be found of providing for the minimum needs of the population ; to-day, in time of peace, the objective to

be aimed at should be the optimum result—namely, the complete satisfaction of physiological requirements in accordance with the latest developments of scientific knowledge. The Ministry of Labour has been asked to carry out a fresh enquiry into nutrition requirements as a basis for cost of living and wages.

The Assembly has called for collaboration between its technical organisations. First, the Health Organisation is invited to continue and extend its studies on nutrition and the problems connected therewith. One of its present objectives is to submit very shortly a plan of work to be examined by the economic, financial and agricultural organisations and institutions.

Simultaneously with this work of the Health Organisation, the other technical organisations are to carry out enquiries into the various aspects — economic and financial — of the problem, in relation to the measures already taken by a number of countries for securing improved nutrition and relieving agricultural distress.

With this object, close collaboration has been instituted between these organisations (Health, Economic, Financial), the International Labour Office and the International Institute of Agriculture at Rome.

As regards the International Labour Office, it is particularly important that it should obtain the assistance of specialists familiar with the social aspects of the problem from the point of view of consumers, and, as regards the International Institute of Agriculture, the assistance of technical agricultural authorities.

In view of the interdependence of the many aspects of the problem — public health, economics, agriculture, administration, finance — arrangements must be made for a comprehensive enquiry embracing the whole of the problems thus raised ; accordingly, the Assembly requested the Council to appoint a committee to submit a general progress report on the work to the next Assembly in September 1936.

This work follows the usual League methods : each technical organisation has set up a Committee of experts selected from among specialists of different nations—namely :

(1) A Committee of experts of the Health Organisation ;

(2) A Committee of experts of the International Labour Office ;

(3) A Committee for liaison between the technical organisations.

These Committees send representatives to one another's meetings : two members of the Committee of health experts are present at proceedings of the Committee of experts of the International Labour Office.

(4) Over these Committees there is the Mixed Committee on the Problem of Nutrition appointed by the Council of the League of Nations to submit a general report on nutrition to the 1936 Assembly.

This Council Committee keeps in touch with the special Committees of experts through the Liaison Committee (3), which will act as Secretariat.

May the close co-operation of Health and Economics sweep from the world that state of under-nutrition which

still remains as a survival of the times of famine ! May it improve the health of mankind by rational feeding and deliver the economic life of the world from the vicious circle in which it has been imprisoned by the great economic depression !

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